

EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE AT AMBLESIDE.

A conference, organised by Mr. Wynn-Williams, H.M. Inspector of Schools for the county of Westmorland, has been held by the Education Committee of the County Council at the Hall of Education, Ambleside. The object of the conference was to consider if it would be possible in schools of all kinds to make a general arrangement by books and things which had for the past 15 years been worked with excellent results in connection with the "Free Books" system, now known as the Parents' Review School. Invitations were sent to the head teachers representing various classes of schools in the county, and, in addition to these, the Education Authority as well as the secondary schools were represented. The teacher-trainers of the teacher schools attended. Public elementary schools—Miss Satterthwaite (Clynehead); Sheard (Kendal); Roberts (Ambleside); Stevenson (Appleby); Mrs. Lister (Bowness); Mr. Gairdner (Coniston); Fuller (Grasmere); Bentley (Ambleside); Joyce (Troutbeck); Lister (Kendal); Gardner (Kendal); Mr. Tupper (Bowness); Mr. Gilkes (Stephen); T. Hook (Brough); Jackson (Warcop); Anderson (Staveley); Webster (Crossescale); Simonson (Mawson); Mr. Simms (Windermere); Preparatory schools—Miss Reynolds (Kendal); Secondary schools—Misses Reynolds (Kendal); Warren (Kendal); Local Education Authority; Miss Tipper (Bowness).

Mr. Wynn-Williams, who apologised for the absence of Mr. Gilkes, the chairman of the County Education Committee, opened the conference.

He (the chairman) congratulated the conference on its representative character, and mentioned they were not together to consider the "parents' review." (1) What were the essentials of an educative syllabus, and how far possible in elementary schools? (2) A curriculum for the use of all schools, including the age of 14 years? (3) English history as the pivot upon which a liberal curriculum should turn. (4) The free use of books by children in making their own education. (5) The saving of time and the relief to the teacher which would accrue from the use of books. He (the chairman) had himself written a syllabus for Miss Mason first, especially as she had found how successful they were amongst the students at the "House of Education." Miss Mason said it was a great pleasure to her to receive the same and accepted her invitation to discuss a matter which concerned all who had education at heart. Education had been placed on different foot-s since the publication of the "Sug- gestions for the consideration of teachers" by the Board of Education. The scheme she was about to suggest was on the lines of that suggestion, but with a view to the last fifteen years with considerable success. She thought they might safely conclude, by the presence of their chairman, they would have his support that the suggestion of adopting a syllabus as suggested above in their schools was a good one. The foundation of a large part of this fuller life was the reading of books. It had been done in afternoons and in school-hours, for it certainly would not be formed afterwards. The habit of studious and connected reading must be got in the highest degree of moral character.

The next item was Nature study, with the foundation of "Common Information," which Huxley said should be the preparation for science. The use of oil-paints and charcoal should be taught to use the brush and charcoal, but not the pencil, and should have "picture-talks."

Physical culture should include hygiene, physiology, and the like subjects. There should also be more culture in order to give a child some self-knowledge and some power of self-direction. Handcrafts, moreover, ought to receive attention, even though not so far as possible based on a course of card-boardloyd.

The Chairman asked how far such a syllabus could be made applicable to the elementaries, and particularly with respect to science.—Mr. Tupper thought that very little science could be taught in elementary schools. There might be a little geography, perhaps, and arithmetic, but pure science was not essential.—Mr. Lister (Kendal) said that in schools where the staff was adequate it might be possible to have a lesson on morals in immediate connection with school life once a week, or to have a weekly illustration in morals.—The Chairman remarked that Miss Mason's suggestion was that the curriculum for all schools should be the same, and included history and the other subjects discussed, and then the difficulties of co-ordination of schools would disappear. He (the chairman) thought it would be difficult to deal with the children from elementary schools, as they knew no Latin, French, or mathematics; but Miss Reynolds was of opinion that French and German could not be postponed.—

Miss Mason said that literature and history were perhaps the crucial subjects, and that they required much time and a common ground of agreement. She also thought by the free use of books much time might be saved, and there would be less need for the teacher.

The Chairman introduced the question of history as the pivot of instruction.—Mr. Stewart enquired how the books could be procured. Mr. Gairdner said whether charge could be made per child, and thought the education authorities would supply text-books and copies of all books used in teaching.—Mr. Tupper saw a difficulty in this suggestion, because education was becoming so costly, and he felt that ratepayers could not be expected to pay.

Mr. Gairdner said that in schools where he expected there were 75 per cent. of the children who were able to buy their own books. Still he anticipated a difficulty in this country.

Mr. Gairdner agreed also, and felt that some years ago this system would have been easier, but that so now, though in former days the children who made up most of his children were great readers.—Mr. Gairdner generally favoured Miss Mason's proposal.—The point of the proposal was that the authority already spent much on education, but that the personal possession of a book was educative and that it would be a good idea to have many of them the contribution gate fell very lightly, in paying something towards the cost of education in this way, and that the local authority might be willing to meet the schools in the matter.